

MONOLOGUES IN THE CONVERSATIONAL ERA: ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION THAT BIG FIRMS ARE REACHING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

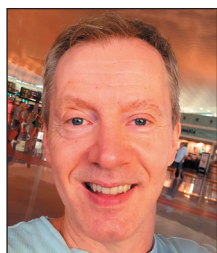
Monólogos en la era de la conversación: Evaluando el nivel de comunicación dialógica de las grandes empresas en los medios sociales

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Abstract

Ibex 35 and *Fortune 500* companies are still not fully utilizing the dialogic potential of social media. The percentage of companies with a low level of dialogic communication exceeds the percentage of companies with a high level in both groups, according to this study which assesses the level of dialogic communication developed by firms with their external audiences on blogs, *Facebook* and *Twitter* in an integrated way. Based on Kent & Taylor's (1998) framework, a dialogic conceptual tool has been created, refined and applied to all the sample. The tool analyzes 73 variables on three dimensions: Presence, Content and Interactivity. Inter-method triangulation has been applied to carry out the research: virtual ethnography, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and interviews with experts.

Keywords

Social media; Social networks; Web 2.0; Dialogic communication; Dialogue; Conversation; Public relations; Best practices; Big companies.

Resumen

Las compañías del *Ibex 35* y del *Fortune 500* aún no están utilizando plenamente el potencial dialógico de las redes sociales. El porcentaje de empresas con un nivel bajo de comunicación dialógica excede el porcentaje de empresas con un nivel alto en ambos grupos, según este estudio que evalúa, de una forma integrada, el nivel de comunicación dialógica alcanzado por las empresas con sus audiencias externas en blogs, *Facebook* y *Twitter*. En base al modelo de Kent & Taylor (1998), se ha creado una herramienta conceptual dialógica, que se ha perfeccionado y aplicado a toda la muestra de estudio. La herramienta analiza 73 variables en tres dimensiones: presencia, contenido e interactividad. Se ha aplicado una triangulación metodológica para llevar a cabo la investigación: etnografía virtual, análisis crítico del discurso (CDA) y entrevistas con expertos.

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Palabras clave

Medios sociales; Redes sociales; Web 2.0; Comunicación dialógica; Diálogo; Conversación; Relaciones públicas; Buenas prácticas, Grandes empresas.

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1. Introduction

Social media are changing the way of making public relations (PR) (Wright, 2005; Wright; Hinson, 2013). The arrival of the web 2.0 opened the door towards fully interactive communication (Ingenhoff; Koelling, 2009; Jo; Kim, 2003), by allowing the receiver of the message to communicate back to the sender and thereby establishing a two-way communication. In this "dialogic communication", as it is called by Kent & Taylor (2002), relationships are recovering the role they had at the beginnings of PR.

Some companies are seizing the opportunities social media offer for communicating with their publics, although most firms still have a one-direction communication on social media and are underutilizing the potential of these tools (Bortree; Seltzer, 2009; Capriotti; Moreno, 2007b; Hether, 2014; Kent, 2013; Kent; Taylor, 1998; Macnamara, 2010; Madichie; Hinson, 2013; McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Taylor; Kent; White, 2001; Watkins; Lewis, 2014; Xifra; Huertas, 2008).

Along the last years some research has studied communication opportunities provided by social media from a qualitative perspective, by adapting and applying the theoretical framework proposed by Kent & Taylor (1998) to guide relationship building on the Web. However, most of these studies focus on only one social platform and single-country companies (Capriotti; Pardo-Kuklinski, 2012; Kim et al., 2014; McAllister-Spooner, 2009; McCorkindale; Morgoch, 2013).

This research assesses the level of dialogic communication developed by companies with their external audiences on Facebook, Twitter and blogs in an integrated way, combining a qualitative approach with a quantitative one. With this aim, a dialogic conceptual tool based on Kent & Taylor's (1998) framework has been created and applied to all the sample, which includes all the Ibex 35 companies, the main reference for the Spanish Stock Exchange nationally and internationally, and a selection of 20 Fortune 500 firms, an annual list published by Fortune magazine that ranks the top 500 United States companies by revenues.

2. Literature review

The searching of dialogue is not new in the public relations field (Kent, 2013; Kent; Taylor, 2002; Pieczka, 2011). First applications of dialogue as a framework for studying communication relationships are found in Ancient Greece, in the Socratic Dialogues of Plato (Kent; Taylor; McAllister-Spooner, 2008). The term dialogue has appeared in the public relations bibliography for over four decades. In fact, the

main objective of excellent public relations is to create a relationship and a dialogue across different stakeholders (Grunig; Grunig; Ehling, 1992; Ledingham; Bruning, 1998; Madichie; Hinson, 2013).

The novelty is that the Internet and social media provide new opportunities for building such relationships. As Ingenhoff & Koelling (2009, p. 66) argue,

"the Internet provides organizations with the unique possibility of engaging publics in dialogue, a key characteristic of excellent public relations."

Social media make easy to establish a dialogue with publics because they enable a shift from the Web as passive information highway to a dynamic platform based precisely on dialogue (Kitchen; Panopoulos, 2010).

However, many companies are still having a one-direction communication on social media (Agozzino, 2015; Capriotti; Moreno, 2007a; Macnamara, 2010; Watkins, 2017; Xifra; Huertas, 2008). Already in the late 90's, Kent & Taylor (1998, p. 331) predicted that

"the Web has great potential as a dialogic communication medium"

but it still remains

underutilized by many organizations and underexamined by scholars as a tool for building organizational-public relationships" (Kent; Taylor, 1998, p. 322).

Social media have

"a tremendous untapped potential" (Kent, 2013, p. 340): the dialogic promise of the Web "has not yet been realized" (Kent; Taylor; McAllister-Spooner, 2008; McAllister-Spooner, 2009).

Kent & Taylor (1998) consider that dialogic communication is the theoretical framework for constructing relationships between organizations and their publics through websites. These authors (1998, p. 325) understand dialogic communication as

"any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions".

They identify five principles of dialogic communication that organizations could follow to promote this kind of communication with their publics:

- 1) ease of interface: users should be able to easily navigate the site;
- 2) conservation of visitors: users should be encouraged to stay on the site;
- 3) generation of return visits: users should have an incentive for returning to the site over time;

4) providing useful information to a variety of publics: users should find information that is specifically tailored to their needs, and

5) maintaining a dialogic loop: users should have opportunities and tools to ask questions and provide feedback.

Although this framework was born to be applied to websites, last years some studies have adapted it to social networks (Adams; McCorkindale, 2013; Agozzino, 2015; Borree; Seltzer, 2009; Hether, 2014; Keller, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Lim; Lee-Won, 2016; Muckensturm, 2013; Rybalko; Seltzer, 2010; Watkins, 2017).

Based on the previous literature review, three research questions are posed in this study:

RQ1. What level of dialogic communication have *Ibex 35* companies in their use of blogs, *Facebook* and *Twitter* with their external audiences?

RQ2. What level of dialogic communication have *Fortune 500* companies in their use of blogs, *Facebook* and *Twitter* with their external audiences?

RQ3. Based on the dialogic principles, what differences, if any, exist between the use of blogs, *Facebook* and *Twitter* by *Ibex 35* companies and *Fortune 500* companies?

3. Methodology

This research focuses on corporate blogs, *Facebook* pages and *Twitter* accounts. These platforms are selected because they are three of the most commonly used tools by companies according to previous studies (Aced; Lalueza, 2012; Barnes; Lescault; Wright, 2013; DiStaso; McCorkindale, 2013; Estudio de Comunicación, 2017; Villanueva; Orihuela, 2012; Wright; Hinson, 2013). In addition, they have a long history among the consolidated social media, which allows us to make a more thorough analysis. The simultaneous study of these three social media tools have allowed us to compare the corporate use across different platforms, as previous authors have done (DiStaso; McCorkindale, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Kim; Kim; Nam, 2014; Luca, 2011). Moreover, from a scientific point of view, *Facebook* pages, *Twitter* profiles and corporate blogs have another strength: all the content published on them is public. This circumstance facilitates an exhaustive study of content published by firms. Lastly, focusing on three social media (*Facebook*, *Twitter* and blogs) makes it possible to study a wider sample of companies and to make a deep analysis of the dialogic aspects of their use of these three platforms.

The subjects for this study are *Ibex 35* and *Fortune 500* companies. The selected sample includes all the *Ibex 35* companies (according to the *Bolsa de Madrid* as of September 1, 2014) and a selection of 20 *Fortune 500* firms. All of them have a blog and/or a *Facebook* page and/or a *Twitter* profile.

At first, in order to identify the social media profiles of these companies, their websites were visited. Following this, three major Internet search engines (*Google*, *Yahoo!* and *Bing*), the *Twitter's* search tool and the *Facebook's* search tool were used subsequently to search for their social profiles because some companies do not include a link to all their social media profiles on their websites. It was decided to

study a maximum of 2 blogs for each company, 2 *Facebook* pages and 4 kinds of *Twitter* profiles (where they exist): the company's corporate account, customer service profile, account targeted to press, and the profile of one of its products. Having applied these criteria, and after eliminating inactive profiles, a total of 31 blogs, 51 *Facebook* pages and 76 *Twitter* accounts were analyzed for six months, from September 2014 to February 2015.

Inter-method triangulation has been applied to carry out the research: virtual ethnography, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and interviews. Qualitative content analysis has been extensively used by scholars to assess the content published by organizations on Internet and to assess the presence or absence of dialogic features (Capriotti; González-Herrero, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Losada-Díaz; Capriotti, 2015; Madichie; Hinson, 2013; McAllister-Spooner; Kent, 2009; Rybalko; Seltzer, 2010; Traynor *et al.*, 2008; Waters; Lo, 2012). However, since not only the content on social networks is important but also the effectiveness and reactions in the audience (Watkins, 2017), a non-participant observation was carried while data was gathering and all the observations were collected in a Field Diary. According to Toledano (2017, p. 598),

"netnography could enrich PR studies into any community and social network that meets online".

As most previous researches on this field, Kent & Taylor's (1998) framework has been the basis to develop a dialogic conceptual tool which allows companies to assess their use of social media. The original framework was created to study websites and this study has adapted it to blogs and social networks. Based on the non-participant observation, the CDA and the review of literature, a 73-item questionnaire was designed, organized in three dimensions: Presence (17 items), Content (35 items) and Interactivity (21 items).

“This study assesses the level of dialogic communication firms reach on social media”

Following the same system as applied in previous research (McCorkindale; Morgoch, 2013; Madichie; Hinson, 2013; Taylor; Kent; White, 2001), every variable is formulated in a dichotomous way in which the presence is positive and the absence is negative (yes = 1, no = 0), except for items related to the frequency of updating and the response time, where a scale of four possible answers was created (with marks from 1, 0.5, 0.25 and 0 points). Final score of the questionnaire is calculated per dimension and the score of each dimension is calculated out of one.

The results of the questionnaire are connected with a five-point scale that ranks companies according to the level of dialogic communication they reach of social media. Called Poliscala and inspired by ancient Greek culture, in this scale organizations are placed in the Necropolis (if they have no presence on social media or their presence is not significant), the Thermal baths (if they are using social media without a clear goal or strategy), the Tavern (if they have a social media presence and interact with their audiences, but neglect content),

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Table 1. Scale of dialogic communication according to the use of social media

	Level of dialogic communication				
	Low				High
	Necropolis	Thermal baths	Tavern	Bibliotheca (library)	Agora
Presence	- <0.51	+ >0.50	+ >0.50	+ >0.50	+ >0.50
Content	- <0.51	- <0.51	- <0.51	+ >0.50	+ >0.50
Interactivity	- <0.51	- <0.51	+ >0.50	- <0.51	+ >0.50

the Bibliotheca/Library (if they use social media and take care of content, but forget to interact with their audiences) or the Agora (if they are making an optimal use of social media because they are concerned about generating valuable content and interacting with their audiences).

This typology starts from the assumption that a presence in social media is essential for companies. Hence, companies with less than 0.5 points on the Presence dimension are ranked automatically in the Necropolis, because it means that they have a low or a nonexistent presence on social media. Content is considered the second key dimension to assess the level of dialogue, because content is the first step to start a conversation. Finally, Interactivity is essential to reach a two-way communication with publics. Depending on the score in these three dimensions, companies are ranked from the Necropolis to the Agora, that is, from 'very low' to 'very high' level of dialogic communication (see Table 1).

The first version of this questionnaire was tested and first refined in November-December 2015 and in February 2016. In March-April 2016, 11 experts were interviewed and asked about the dialogic tool: 5 public relations (PR) & social media consultants and 6 top PR scholars who have published papers on dialogic communication: prof. Kent and prof. Taylor, prof. McCorkindale, prof. Seltzer, prof. Waters and prof. Capriotti. These interviews helped the authors to refine the dialogic conceptual tool. The final version of the questionnaire was applied in May 2016 to all the sample, with data gathered in September 2014, February 2015 and February 2016. In addition, the dialogic conceptual tool has been tested on a sample of thirty-five subjects who applied the questionnaire to assess how the same two companies use social media. This test was useful to assess the reliability

of the questionnaire although the sample is limited.

4. Results

Answering RQ1 and RQ2, results indicate that the dialogic level of the use of social media is higher in the *Ibex 35* companies than in the *Fortune 500* firms. 36% of *Ibex 35* firms and 20% of *Fortune 500* firms have a high or very high level of dialogic communication on social media. However, the percentage of companies with a low level of dialogic communication exceeds the percentage of companies with a high level, both in the *Ibex 35* and the *Fortune 500*.

Although in general the level of dialogue is low, Spanish companies use social media in a more dialogic way than the North American ones. The third question examined the differences between the use of blogs, Facebook and Twitter by *Ibex 35* companies and *Fortune 500* companies. 27% of *Ibex 35* firms and 20% of *Fortune 500* companies have a very high level of dialogic communication on social media. They were placed in the Agora, which is the top dimension in the Poliscale, the scale created in this research that ranks firms according to their level of dialogic communication level. No *Ibex 35* company but 20% of *Fortune 500* firms were placed in the Necropolis, which is the lowest dimension in the Poliscale and include the companies that have no presence or a not significant one on social media.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the application of the dialogic tool to all the sample in September 2014, February 2015 and February 2016. The main results of each dimension (Presence, Content and Interactivity) are exposed below. All the results are from February 2016 and compared with September 2014 and/or February 2015 when it is outstanding. Tables 3 to 5 summarize the results of the study.

Table 2. Results of the application of the dialogic conceptual tool (%)

	<i>Ibex 35</i>			<i>Fortune 500</i>		
	September 2014	February 2015	February 2016	September 2014	February 2015	February 2016
Agora	9.09	13.64	27.27	20.00	20.00	20.00
Bibliotheca	13.64	13.64	9.09	6.67	0	0
Tavern	36.37	36.37	18.18	13.33	20.00	26.67
Thermal baths	40.91	36.37	45.45	40.00	40.00	33.33
Necropolis	0	0	0	20.00	20.00	20.00

Table 3. Summary results of 'Presence' (%)

	<i>Ibex 35</i>			<i>Fortune 500</i>		
	Sept. 2014	Feb. 2015	Feb. 2016	Sept. 2014	Feb. 2015	Feb. 2016
Blogs						
Available in more than one language	18.18	18.18	18.18	0	0	0
Categories	68.18	68.18	63.64	40.00	40.00	40.00
Search engine	59.09	59.09	59.09	40.00	40.00	40.00
Navigation menu	50.00	50.00	45.45	40.00	40.00	40.00
Facebook						
Content in more than one language	4.55	9.09	13.64	0	0	0
Custom tabs	95.45	95.45	95.45	80.00	80.00	80.00
Custom page's profile picture	95.45	95.45	95.45	93.33	93.33	93.33
Custom cover photo	95.45	95.45	95.45	93.33	93.33	93.33
Twitter						
Content in more than one language	13.64	18.18	18.18	0	0	0
Custom profile picture	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Custom header photo	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

4.1. Presence

46% of *Ibex 35* companies had at least one corporate blog. 18% of these blogs were available in more than one language. 6 out 10 had categories and a search engine and half of the analyzed blogs had a navigation menu. 47% of *Fortune 500* companies had at least one corporate blog. 40% of *Fortune 500* companies had categories on blog, included a navigation menu and organized posts by categories.

60% of *Ibex 35* companies and 70% of *Fortune 500* firms had at least one fanpage on *Facebook*. 14% of *Ibex 35* firms published content in more than one language on *Facebook*, which represented a 4% increase over February 2015 and 28% of *Fortune 500* firms. 95% of *Ibex 35* *Facebook* pages had personalized the page's profile picture and the cover photo. 80% of *Fortune 500* *Facebook* pages had custom tabs. 93% had a custom page's profile picture and a custom cover photo on *Facebook*.

6 out of 10 *Ibex 35* companies and *Fortune 500* firms had at least one *Twitter* account. 18% of *Ibex 35* companies published tweets in more than one language in February 2016 and February 2015, which represented a 4% increase over September 2014. All the companies had a custom profile picture and a custom header photo on *Twitter*.

4.2. Content

With respect to the kind of content published on corporate blogs, 73% of *Ibex 35* companies shared textual content, 41% videos, 73% photos and 9% infographics. No company published podcasts. The use of text and photos remained stable since September 2014 and the use of videos and infographics grew over time.

In 41% of *Ibex 35* blogs, author was identified on posts in February 2016. This represented an increase of 4.55 points compared to September 2014 and February 2015. 80% of *Ibex 35* blogs had been updated during last week (last 0-7 days), 0% during last two weeks (last 8-14 days), 6% during last month (last 15-30 days) and 13% had not updated for more than a month.

As for the sort of content published on corporate blogs by *Fortune 500* companies, 47% of them shared textual content, 27% shared videos, 47% photos and 27% infographics. No company published podcasts. The use of text, photos and video remained stable and the use of infographics grew.

In 4 out of 10 *Fortune 500* blogs, author was identified on posts (with any of this data: name, initials, position, etc.). In February 2016, all the *Fortune 500* blogs had been updated during last week (last 0-7 days). This data remained stable from September 2014.

This study expands the Kent & Taylor's dialogic framework created in 1998 for websites

With regard to the kind of content published on *Facebook* pages, 95% of *Ibex 35* companies shared textual content, 59% videos, 95% photos and 4% infographics. No company published podcasts. The use of text and photos remained stable since September 2014 and the use of videos and infographics grew over time.

9 out of 10 *Ibex 35* firms published company's data on the fanpage information section and 41% provided contact information. In no case author's post was identified. 90% of *Ibex 35* *Facebook* pages had been updated during last three days and 9% during last week (last 4-7 days).

Regarding the format of content published on *Facebook* pages by *Fortune 500* firms, results indicate that 93% of them published textual content, 47% videos and 93% photos. No company published podcasts or infographics. The use of text and photos, remained stable since September 2014 and the use of videos grew over time.

9 out of 10 *Fortune 500* firms published company's data on the fanpage information section and 33% provided contact information. In no case author's post was identified. 86% of *Fortune 500* *Facebook* pages had been updated during last three days and 14% during last week (last 4-7 days).

Regarding the kind of content published on *Twitter* pages by *Ibex 35* firms, all of them shared textual content, 23% videos, 95% photos and 18% infographics. No company published podcasts. The use of text remains stable since September 2014. The use of videos, photos and infographics grows over time. 86% of *Ibex 35 Twitter* accounts had been updated last 24 hours and 14% during last three days.

As for the sort of content published on *Twitter* pages, all the *Fortune 500* companies shared textual content, 27% videos and 87% photos. No company published neither podcasts nor infographics in February 2016. The use of text and photos remains stable, the use of videos grew over time and the use of podcasts decreased since September 2014.

Table 4. Summary results of 'Content' (%)

	<i>Ibex 35</i>			<i>Fortune 500</i>		
	Sept. 2014	Feb. 2015	Feb. 2016	Sept. 2014	Feb. 2015	Feb. 2016
Blogs						
Content format						
Text	72.73	72.73	68.18	46.67	46.67	46.67
Audio (podcast)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Video	31.82	36.36	36.36	26.67	26.67	26.67
Photo	72.73	72.73	68.18	46.67	46.67	46.67
Infographic	0	4.55	9.09	20.00	26.67	26.67
Updating frequency						
Last week (0-7 days)	87.50	81.25	80.00	100	100	100
Last two weeks (8-14 days)	6.25	6.25	0	0	0	0
Last month (15-30 days)	6.25	6.25	6.67	0	0	0
Not updated for more than a month	0	6.25	13.33	0	0	0
"About me" section	22.73	22.73	18.18	26.67	26.67	26.67
Contact information	18.18	18.18	18.18	13.33	13.33	13.33
Author is identified	36.36	36.36	40.91	46.67	46.67	46.67
Facebook						
Content format						
Text	95.45	95.45	95.45	93.33	93.33	93.33
Audio (podcast)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Video	27.27	54.55	59.09	13.33	46.67	46.67
Photo	95.45	95.45	95.45	93.33	93.33	93.33
Infographic	0	0	4.55	0	0	0
Updating frequency						
Last 3 days (0-3 days)	85.71	90.48	90.48	85.71	85.71	85.71
Last week (4-7 days)	14.29	9.52	9.52	14.29	14.29	14.29
Last two weeks (8-14 days)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not updated for more than two weeks	0	0	0	0	0	0
Company's data on information section	95.45	95.45	95.45	93.33	93.33	93.33
Contact information	40.91	40.91	40.91	33.33	33.33	33.33
Use of hashtags	18.18	18.18	27.27	26.67	40.00	40.00
Twitter						
Content format						
Text	100	100	100	100	100	100
Audio (podcast)	0	0	0	6.67	0	0
Video	4.55	9.09	22.73	13.33	26.67	26.67
Photo	90.91	90.91	95.45	86.67	86.67	86.67
Infographics	4.55	4.55	18.18	0	0	0
Updating frequency						
Last 24 hours	81.82	86.36	86.36	86.67	86.67	86.67
Last three days (0-3 days)	18.18	13.64	13.64	13.33	13.33	13.33
Last week (4-7 days)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not updated for more than a week	0	0	0	0	0	0
Company's information on bio	100	100	100	100	100	100
Use of hashtags	81.82	81.82	100	93.33	100	100

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All the firms published company's data on *Twitter* bio, both in *Ibex 35* and *Fortune 500*. In no case author was identified on *Twitter*.

When analyzing if companies publish different content, results indicated that 86% of *Ibex 35* companies published different content on *Twitter*, *Facebook* and blog (at least on 2 of these platforms) in February 2016, which meant a fall of 9% over February 2015 and an increase of 14% over September 2014. 93% of *Fortune 500* companies published different content on *Twitter*, *Facebook* and blog (at least on 2 of them) in February 2016, in February 2015 and in September 2014.

4.3. Interactivity

Focusing on the interactivity, 56% of *Ibex 35* blogs had not received any comment. Of the comments received, 31% were

not answered and 12% were answered in less than a week. Just in 9% of *Ibex 35* blogs, answers to comments were tailored in February 2016. This represented an increase of 4 points compared to September 2014. Paying attention to other ways to interact in blogs, it was found that 6 out of 10 *Ibex 35* companies included direct links to social networks profiles and facilities to share the posts on social media. 27% of *Ibex 35* blogs included Call to Action (CTA) such as "continue reading", "click here", "please comment", etc., on posts.

43% of *Fortune 500* blogs had not received any comment. Of the comments received, 43% were not answered and 14% were answered in less than a week. Analyzing other ways to interact, 47% of *Fortune 500* companies included direct links to social networks profiles on blog and included facilities to share the posts on social media. 2 out of 10 blogs included CTA on posts.

Table 5. Summary results of 'Interactivity' (%)

	<i>Ibex 35</i>			<i>Fortune 500</i>		
	Sept. 2014	Feb. 2015	Feb. 2016	Sept. 2014	Feb. 2015	Feb. 2016
Blogs						
Comments are answered						
In less than 24 hours	0	0	0	0	0	0
In less than a week	6.25	12.50	13.33	0	14.29	0
In more than a week	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not answered	50.00	25.00	33.33	57.14	57.14	42.86
Answers to comments are tailored	4.55	9.09	9.09	0	0	0
Direct links to social networks	68.18	68.18	68.18	46.67	46.67	46.67
Facilities to share blog posts on social media	68.18	68.18	68.18	46.67	46.67	46.67
Call To Action (CTA) on posts	31.82	27.27	27.27	20.00	20.00	20.00
Facebook						
Company allow to write in the fanpage's wall	31.82	45.45	50.00	53.33	53.33	73.33
Comments are answered						
In less than 24 hours	28.57	28.57	23.81	28.57	42.86	50.00
In less than a week	19.05	19.05	14.29	21.43	21.43	7.14
In more than a week	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not answered	33.33	33.33	42.86	50.00	35.71	42.86
Answers to comments are tailored	45.45	45.45	40.91	46.67	53.33	53.33
Posts are liked	95.45	95.45	95.45	93.33	93.33	93.33
Posts are shared	90.91	90.91	90.91	93.33	93.33	93.33
CTA on posts	50.00	50.00	50.00	40.00	53.33	53.33
People is tagged	0	0	0	0	0	0
Twitter						
Comments are answered						
In less than 24 hours	22.73	22.73	22.73	6.67	6.67	6.67
In less than a week	9.09	4.55	4.55	6.67	13.33	13.33
In more than a week	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not answered	4.55	4.55	4.55	0	0	0
Answers to comments are tailored	31.82	27.27	27.27	13.33	13.33	13.33
Retweets (RT) are published	68.18	72.73	72.73	86.67	93.33	93.33
Tweets are RT	95.45	95.45	95.45	93.33	93.33	93.33
Tweets are liked	100	100	100	93.33	93.33	93.33
CTA on tweets	72.73	72.73	72.73	66.67	73.33	73.33
People is tagged	0	0	4.55	0	0	0

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Focusing on *Facebook*, half of *Ibex 35* firms allowed users to write in their fanpage wall in February 2016, which represented a 4% increase over February 2015 and a 18% over September 2014. In 19% of *Ibex 35 Facebook* pages there were not comments. 43% of *Ibex 35* firms did not answer the comments received and 24% answered them in less than 24 hours. 4 out of 10 answers to *Facebook* comments were tailored. 9 out of 10 *Facebook* posts were liked, the same number which was shared by users. Half of *Ibex 35* companies included CTA on *Facebook* posts.

Analyzing *Fortune 500 Facebook* pages, 73% of them allowed users to write in their fanpage wall in February 2016. It represented a 20% increase over February 2015 and September 2014. All the *Fortune 500 Facebook* pages received comments. 43% of *Fortune 500* firms did not answer the comments received and 50% answered the comments in less than 24 hours. 9 out of 10 *Facebook* were liked and 93% are shared by users. Half of *Fortune 500* companies included CTA on *Facebook* posts.

Although Internet is multimedia, textual content is the most common used in social media

In relation with interactivity on *Twitter*, 73% of *Ibex 35* companies published retweets. All the *Ibex 35* companies obtained some "like" on their tweets. 9 out of 10 *Ibex 35* companies obtained retweets of their tweets and 7 out of 10 included CTA on their tweets. 4% of *Ibex 35* firms tagged people on their tweets in February 2016, a 4% increase over last year.

68% of *Ibex 35* companies did not receive mentions on *Twitter*. 4% of *Ibex 35* firms did not answer the mentions received. 27% answered them with a custom reply and 23% answered to mentions received on *Twitter* in less than 24 hours.

Analyzing the activity of *Fortune 500* firms on *Twitter*, 93% of them published retweets. 9 out of 10 *Fortune 500* companies obtained some "like" on their tweets and/or obtained retweets of their tweets. 73% of *Fortune 500* companies included CTA on their tweets.

8 out of 10 *Fortune 500* companies did not receive mentions on *Twitter*. 13% answered to mentions received on *Twitter* with a custom reply and 7% answered to mentions in less than 24 hours.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study concludes that *Ibex 35* and *Fortune 500* companies are still not fully utilizing the dialogic potentials of social media, in line with previous researches (Bortree; Seltzer, 2009; Kim et al., 2014; McAllister-Spooner; Kent, 2009; McAllister-Spooner, 2012; Rybalko; Seltzer, 2010). Although 3 out of 10 *Ibex 35* firms had a very high level of dialogic communication on social media (they are placed in the Agora, the top dimension in the Polyscale) in February 2016 -and this represents an increase over previous years- and 2 out of 10 *Fortune 500* firms had a very high level of

dialogic communication, the percentage of companies with a low level of dialogic communication (which are placed in the Thermal baths or Necropolis) exceeds the percentage of companies with a high level, both in the *Ibex 35* and the *Fortune 500*. The Agora is still an aspiration for most companies under study.

The social media preferred by the *Fortune 500* companies were *Facebook* (70%) and *Twitter* (62%). The *Ibex 35* firms used *Twitter* (62%) and *Facebook* (60%) at the same level. In both cases, blogs appeared in third place (45%). The use of several social media is the most basic and important thing, since having presence is the starting point of a dialogue. As previously explained, a scarce presence in social media leads the company directly to the lowest category in the Polyscale: the Necropolis.

Content is the first step to start a conversation, and for this reason it is considered the second key dimension to assess the level of dialogue in this typology. In fact, in the Agora we find the companies that are concerned about generating valuable content. Although Internet is multimedia, textual content is the most common used by companies on social media, followed by photos and videos. The use of videos and infographics grows over time. No company published podcasts: previous studies also show that the use of audio content is very low (Waters; Williams, 2011).

The frequency of updating is another of the aspects that are considered in the content dimension of the questionnaire. *Twitter* was the social network which was more often updated, followed by *Facebook* and blogs. 8 out of 10 *Ibex 35* and *Fortune 500* companies published tweets every day, and nearly 95% of the firms of the sample updated *Facebook* pages during last week. Weekly updating was also the most common in blogs. The frequency of updating social networks was the variable that showed the greatest difference from the results of Losada-Díaz & Capriotti recent study (2015).

Authorship is a key aspect in blogs: in 4 out of 10 analyzed blogs, author was identified. However, this information was not provided in any case in *Facebook* or *Twitter*. Previous research (Aced; Lalueza, 2016; Lee; Hwang; Lee, 2006; Xifra; Huertas, 2008) suggests that impersonal corporate blogs are not well accepted by the community because they are seen as marketing tools.

In this study, there are several meaningful findings on interaction, which is the essential dimension to reach a two-way communication with publics: it is impossible to reach the Agora without interacting with publics. Above all, consistent with the findings of previous research (Aced; Lalueza, 2016; McCorkindale, 2010; Rybalko; Seltzer, 2010; Xifra; Huertas, 2008), the level of interaction with the publics is still very low and many companies do not seem to be interested in conversation: comments were not answered in 3 out of 10 *Ibex 35* blogs, and 4 out of 10 *Fortune 500* blogs. In *Facebook*, 4 out of 10 companies did not answer the comments, both in *Ibex 35* and *Fortune 500*. In *Twitter*, 6 out of 10 *Ibex 35* firms, and 8 out of 10 *Fortune 500* companies did not receive any mention, which is the first step to start a conversation.

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“Likes” and “shares/retweets” were the most common method of interaction in *Facebook* and *Twitter* (9 out of 10 publications were liked and/or shared by users in both social networks either in *Fortune 500* or *Ibex 35* companies).

Most companies published different content on *Twitter*, *Facebook* and blog (at least on 2 of these platforms). However, the ideal would be that all the content was different in each social media and adapted to the features of each platform, as previous research suggest (Aced; Lalueza, 2016).

To sum up, it should be noted that this research shows that there is not a big difference between the use of social media that make the North American and Spanish companies, as previous studies point out (Aced; Lalueza, 2016; Losa-da-Díaz; Capriotti, 2015). Results of this research show that the dialogic level of the use of social media is higher in the *Ibex 35* companies than in the *Fortune 500* firms.

Although few companies are placed in the Necropolis (no *Ibex 35* firms but 20% of *Fortune 500* firms), which is the lowest category in the Polyscale, most firms are placed in the Thermal baths (45% of *Ibex 35* and 33% of *Fortune 500* firms), which is the second level of low dialogue in this typology and we find companies that believe that merely being on social platforms is good enough to obtain results, without a clear goal and strategy. About 20% of companies both in *Ibex 35* and *Fortune 500* are ranked in the Tavern, where are placed firms that have social media presence and interact with their audiences but neglect the content. No *Fortune 500* firms and only 9% of *Ibex 35* companies are placed in the Bibliotheca: these companies take care of content but forget to interact with their publics. These data might seem encouraging, but companies should aspire to be ranked in the Agora if they want to fulfill the promise of dialogue offered by social media. Agora is only available to those companies that have registered on a website and want to interact with their audiences: only they might achieve the desired two-way communication in social media.

“A dialogic conceptual tool has been created, refined and applied”

5.1. Limitations

All research has its limitations and this one is no exception. The fact of limiting the number of blogs and social networks profiles under study is one limitation of this study. As previously explained, it was decided to study a maximum 2 blogs, 2 *Facebook* pages and 4 *Twitter* accounts for each company of the sample. In addition, the size of the sample is also limited. All the *Ibex 35* companies were included in the study but only a selection of 20 *Fortune 500* firms with blog and/or a *Facebook* page and/or a *Twitter* profile were studied.

Regarding the questionnaire and the creation of the scale, 11 experts on social media and public relations were interviewed and it had been tested on a sample of thirty-five subjects. In the future, more expert interviews could be done and the tool could be tested with a larger number of participants.

Despite these limitations, this research also makes a significant contribution to knowledge in public relations. The results of this study have theoretical and managerial implications for both researchers and practitioners.

5.2. Future directions

This study extends the investigation of online dialogic communication by examining in an integrated way the application of dialogic principles on blogs, *Facebook* and *Twitter* by companies. It expands and updates the Kent & Taylor’s dialogic framework created in 1998 to be applied in websites.

“Companies are still not fully utilizing the dialogic potential of social media”

The creation of a dialogic conceptual tool (a questionnaire) and a scale (the Polyscale) which ranks firms according to their use of social media provide researchers a theoretical tool for expanding the study of social media from a public relations approach. Furthermore, both the questionnaire and the Polyscale are proposed as tools that might help standardize the qualitative evaluation of how companies are using social media. The questionnaire allows practitioners to evaluate how its firm is using social media in terms of Presence, Interactivity and Content, as well as to categorize it according to this use. Once the questionnaire is applied, the results rank the company in the Polyscale, the scale of social media use. According to the category where it is located, the company obtains useful information for improving its social media strategy and increasing the level of dialogue with publics. And not only that: the practitioners can apply the questionnaire to the competitors and obtain a very useful benchmark.

In the future, other social networks such as *LinkedIn*, *Instagram* or *Snapchat* might be added to the study, expanding and adapting the questionnaire to include these platforms.

Furthermore, the methodology of this research, the questionnaire and the Polyscale might be applied to other markets and countries. Firstly, the study might be replicated with firms listed in the stock exchanges indexes of other economic contexts. Secondly, the investigation might be extended to other developed and developing countries. And the model is not only applicable at companies, it can also be applied to other types of organizations, such as non-profits and universities.

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